

## Athlete Profile (National)

### Buddy Mays – A Paralympic Hopeful



Charles “Buddy” Mays is a 32-year-old Army veteran from Meansville, Georgia. This June, he is returning to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for his second year of participation. “I had such a good time last year that a team of wild horses could not keep me away,” he says. “I like to be around everybody there, especially so many other veterans in wheelchairs. It allows me to not only challenge myself, but build some new friendships.”

While serving in Iraq, Mays was on patrol after completing a mission in Baghdad, on his way back to base. When the Hummer Mays was riding in ran over an improvised explosive device, Mays was blown from his position in the gunner’s hatch and thrown approximately 30 yards from the vehicle. The convoy stopped and provided medical attention to those who needed it, including Mays. After he was air evacuated to his base in Baghdad and stabilized, he was flown to Bagram Air Force Base in Germany. Injuries to Mays’ spinal cord left him paralyzed from the waist, down. Two of his friends were fatally injured in the sudden explosion.

Despite his injuries, Mays now attributes wheelchair sports to improving his quality of life. “I really didn’t play a lot of sports in high school,” he says. “After my injury, I had a really hard time accepting my disability. Participating in wheelchair sports really helped elevate my spirit and brought me out of a depressive mode.” Mays is grateful to his recreation therapist at the VA medical center in Dublin, Georgia where he receives continuing care and encouragement.

“My recreation therapist recognized that I had lots of potential, ability and drive. She suggested that I participate in VA’s national rehabilitation events. It was one of the best pieces of advice I have gotten since my injury,” Mays says, noting that it didn’t take long until he became addicted to this active lifestyle. “It is the majority of my lifestyle now. I like to do anything to push my limits.” He hits the gym three days per week and completes his routine of strength training, treadmill and swimming. Demonstrating his commitment, he now hopes to someday compete in the Paralympics, the equivalent of the Olympics for world class athletes with disabilities.

Returning to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games this year, Mays will compete in the bowling, air guns, slalom and nine-ball events. “Slalom is a big challenge and one that I enjoy the most,” he says. “I am really looking forward to comparing how I do this year with last year. Nine-ball (another favorite) is just my game!”

Aside from the physical benefits, Mays finds the social aspects of the Games to be very important. “Socializing with the other vets is a big part of participating for me. This is often the only time I see some of my closest friends. You can’t beat the camaraderie. It goes all the way back to basic training, where one of the main points we were taught is that you are always together, regardless of where you are located.”